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Sketches

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SKETCHES

OF A

NEW-ENGLAND VILLAGE,

IN THE

LAST CENTURY.

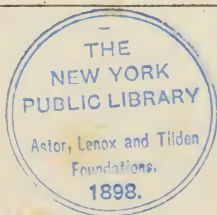
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SKETCHES.

LETTER I.

“ Ah happy hills ! ah pleasing shade !
Ah fields beloved in vain !
Where once my careless childhood stray'd,
A stranger yet to pain !
I feel the gales, that from you blow,
A momentary bliss bestow.”

GRAY.

You request me, my dear friend, to give you a written account of that period in my early life which has interested you so much in the recital. It can only be from the contrast those early days present to your own elevated station in society, that scenes of remote retirement and humble obscurity can afford you interest. In looking back on them myself, they seem to have passéd in another and earlier world. It has been beautifully said, that “the actions and events of our childhood lie like fair pictures in

the air ; always in memory, they are objects of beauty, however base their origin and neighborhood." In looking back, therefore, I am grateful that my early life was passed in remote obscurity, amid scenes of humble virtue, of peace and beauty.

You have seen, I think, W——, the distant village in New England, where I spent nearly the last half of the last century. Perhaps, however, you have merely looked at it as a passing traveller, and did not remark its simple beauty. To memory, every tree, every green pasture and humble dwelling, are as familiar as the room I sit in. It was distant about two miles from the ocean, and scattered on both sides of a small but tranquil and beautiful river, which was crossed by a wooden bridge in the centre of the village. On the north side rose gentle hills gracefully from the river, and on the south spread out level meadows, dotted with button-wood trees and weeping elms. The meeting-house and parsonage were on the north side, overlooking on the south the village, whose houses were scattered about the bridge, and ascended, at least the better sort, towards the church. Beyond the hills on the north, stretched out, as if to shelter us, the protecting forest.

The meeting-house was the square, barn-like structure, common at that period to all New England. Ours, however, was adorned with a steeple and belfry, and graced with a most sweet sounding bell.

You must remember my often-repeated descriptions of the dear old parsonage. It was a tolerably large, dark, unpainted house, two stories in front, full of windows, to admit all the genial influences of the south, while on the north it sloped down so that one might lay his hand on the roof. These old fashioned houses are fast disappearing from our country. They were admirably calculated to protect us from the severe winters of our climate. The front always turned to the sun, and the long sloping roof, on which the deep snows rested, afforded from that very circumstance, a protecting warmth. Almost the only picturesque object in our unpoetical county, the long well-pole, with its "mossy, iron-bound bucket," is disappearing with them.

Our house was rather irregular in form, and on the outside of a most venerable blackness, stained here and there with spots of moss and decay. We entered a sort of low, wide hall, which had been originally built of logs, by a

low portal. A block of unhewn granite, worn smooth and even hollow on the surface by the weary feet of many pilgrims, was the door-step. The rest of the house had been added at a later period. On the right of this low hall a door led to my father's study, and on the opposite side to our little parlor. At the back part were the kitchen, dairy, etc. In the hall stood the spinning-wheels, and it was hung all around with skeins of linen and woollen yarn, and with other productions of rural and domestic labor. This humble dwelling was overshadowed by two giant sycamore trees, while its only ornament, the double white rose, grew profusely about its doors and windows.

I cannot but look back with gratitude to Heaven for the charm of solitude and beauty that environed my home. "A piteous lot it were to flee from man and not rejoice in nature." I loved, and I love still the glorious ocean, the gentle, quiet river, the sheltered valley, and the protecting forest of my native village.

My father, as you remember, was the pastor of this parish. It was a wide and scattered one, although the immediate village was small. The inhabitants of the village were poor ; the richer portion of the parishioners living on distant

farms. Owing to its proximity to the ocean, I suppose, there was a great proportion of poor widows in the parish—the men probably going to sea, or on fishing voyages, where many of them perished.

It was long before any sectarians had invaded our parishes, and when the influence of the clergy was very great. Perhaps at that time they exercised a more extended and absolute influence than should ever be granted to any class of men in a free country. Their counsel was asked and taken in all temporal as well as spiritual affairs, and they were looked up to with unbounded reverence. But never was this influence lodged in purer hands, and never exercised with more disinterested and beneficent effect than in the case of my father.

The death of my mother happened about my fifteenth year, and left him a mourner with eight children, of which I was the eldest but one, and the youngest an infant of a day old. My mother's death was unexpected, although she had long been an invalid. It came upon us like a stunning blow. I never can forget the agony of my father. I had never seen a man weep, and there was something awful in his grief. I remember the day and night of her death, he

walked the chamber in which she lay, pouring out his tears like a river. We poor children fled from him like frightened birds, or crept stealthily into the room, afraid to remind him of ourselves, or of any thing else. But the next morning, which was Sunday, he had the infant brought to him, and calling us all into the room, and kneeling with us around the bed on which lay the cold, inanimate form of her he loved so fondly, he poured out his soul in a prayer that served to calm and console us all, and seemed to unite again the severed bond of love. After that he went to church, and preached as usual all day. I never, but once again saw him weep, but I also scarcely ever saw him smile.

From that moment the care of the younger children, under his direction, devolved on my sister and myself. The influence he exercised over us all was gentle, but it was absolute and unbounded. It was the influence of religious principle and devoted tenderness. To oppose his mild authority was as little thought of as it would have been to break through the wall of the house, when there was an open door to go out. Yet he was not unwisely indulgent. The extreme frugality of our manner of life allowed us few desires. Our remoteness from cities and

all factitious pleasures limited so much our action, that there were few occasions that called for discipline. Our employments were of the simplest and most natural kind. A walk on the beach to gather shells, or in the woods to gather berries, the care of birds and animals, the repeated study of our few books—these were our pleasures.

LETTER II.

“A man he was to all the country dear,
And passing rich—with forty pounds a year.”

GOLDSMITH.

IF ever the spirit of Christianity breathed in mortal form since that of its Divine Founder, my father's was its chosen dwelling. The principle of duty, under the sanction of religion, was the great aim of his life. To this he subjected his fine imagination; and all the powers of a deep thinking and extended mind were brought to guard and preserve the sanctity of an enlightened conscience.

“Much impress'd
Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,
And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds
May feel it too. Affectionate in look,
And tender in address, as well becomes
A messenger of grace to guilty men.”

This celebrated description of Cowper's does not express the purity, disinterestedness, and zeal with which he served his parish. It was

his daily prayer that he might spend and be spent in the cause of his Master. Never was prayer more completely answered. He had received the best education the country could then afford to young men; his mind was stored with sound learning and elegant literature, his imagination was of the highest order, and yet he had no dearer ambition than to devote himself to his Master's service in this obscure parish, among a humble, honest, simple people. He had, however, his joys.

“Solitude was not.

We heard upon the wind the articulate voice

Of God. He sat, and talked

With winged messengers; who daily brought

To his small island—tidings of love and joy.”

I retain a vivid recollection of his appearance about the time of my mother's death. I think it was rather striking. He was not tall, but his form was entirely faultless. His complexion was pale, but not fair. A dark, quiet, penetrating eye occasionally beamed with the softest, most tender expression. Every feature was perfectly formed, and his smile revealed teeth of dazzling whiteness. His hair was black, thick, and clustering, with here and there a thread of silver. He was always dressed in black, with

knee-breeches and black silk stockings, and plain silver buckles in his shoes. The old-fashioned three cornered cocked hat was at that time worn by all the clergy. After my mother's death, the care of his clothes devolved on me. I always ironed his shirts, plaited his fine cambric stocks, brought him his shoes and slippers, and performed all those little personal services which are so dear and precious when rendered to one we love. These, my dear friend, are trifles. But the sum of life is made up of small materials, and those trifles that make us happy swell into the importance of great events.

His temperament was cheerful, but I think after my mother's death he lost the vivacity and gaiety which had been a marked trait in his character, and also all inclination for society, except that of his children. His manner towards us was that of gentle and affectionate playfulness; to others it was a courteous and manly simplicity. His habit was, to work in his garden, which he cultivated wholly with his own hands, in the morning, to visit and receive his parishioners in the afternoon, and to pass all his evenings in his study. About nine o'clock he came into the little parlor, where we were always collected around a little stand, with a

single lamp or candle, which dispensed light enough for the finest work for our young eyes. (Alas! I can now scarcely see with two argands.) After chatting a little, our single servant was called in. My father possessed a most exquisite voice, and my elder sister sang well. They sang together one of those touching old tunes, "Dundee's wild warbling measure, or plaintive Martyrs," to the words of Watts, which I can never, even at this old age, hear without tears; a short prayer followed, and then with kisses and blessings he dismissed us to our pillows, to sweet dreams and early waking. The family devotion was the same in the morning, except that a short portion of the Scriptures was substituted for the hymn.

What an enviable fame is that of Watts! Equally a favorite with the child, and with the full of years; and cherished wherever devotional poetry is sought or valued. At the cottage fireside, where the timid voice lisps its evening hymn by its mother's keee; in the lonely church, where two or three are gathered together in the wilderness, or by the rushing stream, his poetry is heard. His hymns console the prisoner's solitary hours; they cheer the weary night of the wakeful invalid; they are whispered

at the ear of sorrow, and are often the last sounds that are breathed from the lips of the dying. To those who have been nurtured in the love of this sweetest songster in Israel, no other sacred poetry will ever appear half so affecting and devout.

There were, as I have said above, at this time, no sectarians and no visible division in the parishes, but there was not, of course, entire unanimity of sentiment among the clergy any more than at present. My father differed from his brethren, although he was no bigot. He was, I think, what has been called a moderate Calvinist. Jonathan Edwards was a distant connexion, and kept up a constant correspondence with him, and I find, on looking at his letters, that they differed much on what were considered essential points in theology. Edwards died before I could have any recollection of him ; but I have been told, notwithstanding his severe theology, he was a singularly mild and gentle character, and almost timid in manner.

My father's preaching must have been singularly plain and direct. I remember he often brought Washington's example into the pulpit as a model for all the humble, common virtues,

as well as for those which were peculiar to himself. It was the custom then for the clergy to preach upon all subjects of public interest. I remember the sermons at the time of Jay's British treaty, the tax on ardent spirits, and when the French frenzy invaded the land. There were at this time neither reading-rooms, lyceums, nor even newspapers, in these remote parishes. The pulpit, therefore, was the organ of information to the people, and the clergy were expected to preach upon topics that would now be quite out of their province.

Our parish was wholly faithful to the principles of Washington. I remember the enthusiasm that prevailed when his Farewell Address was read from the pulpit. My father wept at his death. It was the only one, except my mother's, that ever drew tears from him. The mourning, that was universal throughout the country, reached the little quiet corner where our parish was placed. Every man, woman, and child, put on black. What an eloquent tribute to the father of his country !

That my father thought every one had better travel the road to heaven in the vehicle that suited him best, I infer from many circumstances. A wounded French soldier passed a whole

winter during the war by our kitchen fire. He had lost both legs to the knee, and moved about on the stumps. We pitied him, and loved to hear his broken English, or rather a mixture of French and English. He was a Catholic, and wore a rosary with a crucifix. He always, however, attended our family prayers, crossing himself repeatedly during his devotions. My father took no notice of it, and never allowed the children to question him, or to smile at his ostentation of Catholic observance. All the French, who came to help us through the war, were probably Catholics, and our own people must then have embraced them as brothers. The jealousy and hatred of Catholics is the growth of later times. My father, although a Calvinist, revered this poor man's religion; and never, that I knew of, made any attempt to convert him. He probably thought, as we are all children of one Father, *he* drew as near in his ignorance to the character of a confiding child, as *we* in our presumption of greater knowledge. This poor Frenchman made wooden spoons and forks, his only tool a sharp knife. He attained such perfection in spoons, that those made of our colored maples were really beautiful. If, according to a late definition, "religion

is manifested in the pursuit of perfection in any direction *whatever*," he was the most religious man among us, for his wooden spoons were as perfect as wooden spoons could be. Perhaps it would be better to adhere to the old definition—"To do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God."

LETTER III.

“ Beautiful as sweet,
And young as beautiful, and soft as young,
And gay as soft, and innocent as gay,
And happy, (if aught happy here,) as good !”

YOUNG.

You do not remember my elder sister. She died before I had the happiness of numbering you among my friends. Would you had known her ! She was a year or two older than myself, but in stature, in feeling, and in heart, we were twins, although she was distinguished from me by a rare loveliness of person and of character. I have always thought Miss Edgeworth must have known such an one, when she drew her charming little “ Simple Susan.” She possessed the same unselfish traits ; the same conscientious devotedness to domestic love, and domestic duty. On her principally, as the eldest daughter, devolved the care of the household and the younger children.

I can see her now, bright and cheerful as the

summer morning, with her spotless apron and simple cap, going from room to room, and from closet to closet, to see that no dust and no stain remained, and then sitting down with her basket heaped with work, cheerful, happy, ready for every service, and for every duty.

“ Her life was like the violet sweet,
As climbing jasmine pure.”

It is true I aided her as much as I could, but I fear I never possessed the steadiness of character and disinterested self-devotion which distinguished her. The time and minds of both, indeed, were filled with care and labor ; and when you know the extent of our family, you will not wonder that a long summer's day was too short for our work. It consisted of twin brothers, next to myself; then, a most lovely creature, my sister A——, five years younger than myself, and two very young children—the infant soon followed its mother, and was laid by her side, in the quiet, shady corner of the grave-yard. That our lives were thus early filled with care is not remarkable. My father's salary scarcely ever amounted to five hundred dollars, and during the depreciation of continental money, only one dollar in forty was paid. All the garments of the family were made and repaired by my

sister and myself, with the single exception of a visit twice a year from a poor lame tailor, to fit my brother's clothes. All the linen and cotton for the use of the family were spun in the house. The weaving was done by the poor women of the village. I was fond of spinning on the little foot-wheel, although my father would never allow me to sit at it more than half an hour. He thought the employment unhealthy, and so it undoubtedly is, while spinning on the large wheel affords exercise to the whole body. I know not a more cheerful object than a young girl spinning at the large wheel. Notwithstanding the monotonous sound of her wheel, she always accompanies it with a lively song. But I forget, you never saw that old fashioned inspirer of cheerfulness, the spinning-wheel. The soothing sound will never again be heard in our land. Our factories are thronged with the young women of the country. They can now purchase farms, and even husbands. Perhaps indeed, they have more information, more cultivation, but are they as happy as the village maiden who sang all day long to the drowsy accompaniment of her spinning-wheel?

Fortunately at this time we had few books, for we had little time for reading. The few

books we did possess were prized as books never were before. They were not only read, they were studied, and got by heart. I have often thought now that new books are heaped upon each other, till our library tables groan with the weight, of the value we attached to the old.

Perhaps our situation was favorable to the rapid development of the intellect. Enough was granted to keep the mind awake, and so much withheld that the curiosity was always alive and the thirst for knowledge intense. Out of our own house we had absolutely no intellectual society, but we were not cut off from the "still, sad music of humanity." Human nature is much the same, whether dressed in homespun at the spinning-wheel, or in velvet at the harp. Now and then also a gifted individual would wander to our Patmos; and it is difficult for those, who are in the midst of all that is refined and intellectual in daily intercourse, to understand the intense delight with which we listened, and the care with which every chance word and every passing thought of genius were treasured, and remembered, and dwelt upon. It is true, these visits were like angels', "few and far between," but they seem now to me like those

seeds wafted by the wind, and arrested by some obstacle in the desert, around which are collected soil and verdure, till at length a beautiful oasis is formed, where there was before nothing but barren sand.

I remember well some instances of the value we attached to books. "Cowper's Task" had been lent to us in an English edition. Of course we could not obtain it, and I copied the whole of it into a paper book. At a later day I also copied the "Pleasures of Hope," and the "Pleasures of Memory." "Paradise Lost" was the only poem our library contained. That, with "Pilgrim's Progress," was our Sunday reading. My father's library consisted of Greek and Latin classics, sealed treasures to me, and old-fashioned theology which I never liked. That quaint old book, "Mather's Magnalia," was a great favorite, and Mrs. Rowe's "Devout Meditations" I got by heart. I always took this last book with me when I went to the sea-side. It is impossible for me to describe the deep melancholy that took possession of my mind at this early age, when the darkness of twilight and evening gathered over the ocean. The darkness seemed to come up from some mysterious region beyond, where thought was

lost, and despair dwelt. I could not solve the mystery, for my temper was naturally cheerful. I do not wonder that persons of a melancholy temperament have thrown themselves into the deep waters, seeking for oblivion under the influence of feelings I have myself experienced.

LETTER IV.

“ Her duties walked their narrow round,
Nor pause, nor interruption knew.”

I MUST not forget, in the enumeration of our family, our humble domestic friend and servant, Hannah. She was the most devoted, pains-taking creature, slaving from morning till night ; never pausing nor resting while her hand found anything to be done. I fear there are few such servants at this time. Our luxury has multiplied a very different class. With the increase of our riches, we have banished these humble friends from our firesides.

Hannah had been the nurse of my mother, and accompanied her purely from affection, on her marriage, to the obscure village where Providence had cast her lot, hiding, as she thought, her own and her mistress' light under a most vulgar bushel. It was so, for she possessed many and most rare virtues. She had helped to bring us all into the world, had

nursed our infancy, scolded and coaxed us, taught us to walk and to speak ; her influence was, therefore, unbounded. Her devotion to my mother was unparalleled. After her death she steadily opposed herself to all change, to all innovation ; and (pardon me, adored shade of my mother !) to all improvement. I remember many amusing contests between my sister and Hannah on subjects of domestic economy. My sister's mild, but firm temper generally prevailed over Hannah's deep-rooted habits. She would yield, however, with a bad grace, always repeating some of her time-honored proverbs. " Young folks will be notional. We can't expect old heads on young shoulders," etc.

Before she came to my mother, she had lived with an English lady of some rank in Boston, and had inherited her old clothes. On week-days, she wore a skirt and short gown, her gray hair combed back over a high cushion, such as were worn in the days of Queen Anne, and with a low-crowned, wide-bordered cap pinned on the top. But on Sundays she shone out in all her glory. She always went to church in the afternoon ; then she appeared in a yellow satin skirt, with flowers of various colors worked all over it, an open brocade

gown with a train, short sleeves and black silk mitts. A snow-white lawn handkerchief was pinned over her shoulders. Her cap gave place to a small black silk bonnet. A fan and high-heeled shoes completed her appearance. This, to be sure, formed a striking contrast to the homespun dresses of the larger part of the congregation. I believe they thought poor Hannah proud, as she sat in the front gallery fanning herself, and hated her; she repaid them, I am sure, with the utmost contempt.

Hannah was a most outrageous tory. She could not bear the name of Washington; and that Lafayette, that good young nobleman, should come to mix up his fortunes with rebels, really wore upon her health. She was rather high church, also, in her religion. Under her pillow was always a Prayer-book of the Church of England; although, out of respect to my father, or to show her finery, she always went to meeting in the afternoon, and she never failed coming in to prayers; indeed, my father's deep and sincere piety must have convinced even her of the purity of his religion.

I believe I was past twenty before I emancipated myself from Hannah's control. I could not bear to wound the devoted affection and the

time-honored prejudices of the faithful creature. I remember an instance of her control over me. I had hitherto worn my hair in flowing curls over my shoulders, but as the fashion had changed, I wished to gather it with a comb to the back of my head, and my father, the last time he went to Boston, had bought me a comb for that purpose. But Hannah opposed herself most violently to the change. She said that only negroes wore their hair short, and that was because, poor creatures, God had given them nothing but wool. Beside, I was nothing but a child (I was twenty), and why should I try to look like a woman? I yielded to Hannah, and laid aside the comb, and this shows her absolute influence that I should yield in a matter in which personal vanity was somewhat concerned. But she deserved that we should yield to her in some small matters, for she saved us from much care and labor,—she cooked and washed, made butter and cheese, soap and beer, and was always provided for our numerous guests.

I have often since wondered how my father could practise such extended hospitality. Perhaps the frugality of our usual manner of life furnished the means. We seldom saw animal food on our table. We lived on the produce of

our dairy and our garden ; and the fowls and lambs, of which we always had good store, were reserved for the honored guest. All the clergy came to our fireside as to a home. We had a little apartment, called the prophet's chamber, where a bed was always kept prepared ; and as there was neither bolt nor lock on either of our doors, they frequently arrived after the family had retired to rest. Providing shelter and food for their horses in the stable, and finding an unguarded way to the dairy, they afterwards went to the prophet's chamber, and the first we knew of our guest was his appearance at breakfast the next morning. On days of prayer, ministers' meetings, and ordinations, our house was filled. Poor Hannah used to say, she could do very well with the ministers, but they brought so many alligators (meaning delegates) with them, that they ate all before them.

But to return to Hannah. After the death of my father, and the dispersion of our family, she married a man who must have sought her for the little money she had saved, for she was past sixty years old. He spent it, and they became extremely poor, together with a blind daughter of his ; and the little that I could do for her alone saved her from want and misery.

At her death, Hannah bequeathed to me the few articles she possessed that had belonged to my mother. During all her poverty and distress, she could never be induced to part with one of them. Poor Hannah ! with all thy faults, I love thee still.

LETTER V.

“Pointing with taper spire to heaven.”

I HAVE described the outside of the village meeting-house; let me now introduce you to the interior, bare, desolate, and cold in winter. It was sunny and hot in summer, large, unpainted, full of windows, without blinds or curtains, and, with the exception of one pew, wholly unadorned. The pulpit was small and rather low; immediately beneath the pulpit was a large seat for the elders, as they were called. These consisted of two venerable old men, trembling and bent with age, with long silken white hair, stern and solemn, fearful to idle and playful children. In front of these sat the deacons, also two, and both old men. I remember the striking contrast presented by my father's yet unchanged black, curling hair, to all these venerable gray-headed men. Just in front of the deacons were seats for the choir of singers, although they were afterwards removed to the front gallery.

It now seems to me there was an unusual proportion of old people in the church. Perhaps the common fallacy of the young made it appear so to me. There were often infants present with their mothers, not, as at an earlier period, because the fear of the Indians prevented them from being left at home without the guardian care of the father, but because the distance of their homes prevented the parents returning between the morning and evening service, and the babies could not be so long divided from the mother. The usual manner of coming to church was on horseback, the women behind their husbands or brothers. It was a pretty sight, on a sunny summer's morning, to see them emerging from the hills in twos and threes, while the pedestrians were crossing the meadows, and the children scattered about the church-yard in quiet, silent groups. The moment the bell ceased, the church seemed to swallow them up, and there was solitude and silence for the space of an hour, when they all again poured out, and the scene was again a gay one, for many of the old women, even in summer, wore the scarlet cloak, at that time so much the fashion.

There was one custom which I remember

(and I fear it is one which has passed away with the primitive manners of our forefathers) with particular pleasure. Many of the families of our parish lived too far from the church to return, during the short intermission, to their homes. They were always invited to pass that time at the house of the pastor. In the summer, a long table was spread, with bread, milk, and cheese, under the trees in the orchard, in the winter, by the kitchen fire. The summer repast was always delightful. We, children, waited upon them, poured out the milk for the old men, tended the infants, and with this simple custom, Sunday was made a holiday for the indulgence of our best affections. I remember an old man who was always one of the guests. His hair was perfectly white, and he had lost an arm in the old French war. He had many stories to tell of the Indians and their cruelties, to listen to which I did most seriously incline. He thought the war of the Revolution mere child's play, compared to the one in which he had been an actor. After the death of this old soldier, the Sunday parties lost much of their interest in my childish estimation.

There was one of the old men who might

have sat for Scott's portrait of Douce Davie Deans. He was one of the elders, a severe and bigoted puritan. Travellers have been struck with the resemblance of the New-England character to that of the Scotch. To one who has lived in a New-England village in the last century, when the population was more homogeneous than at the present day, the characters in Scott's novels must often seem like familiar friends. The covenanter and the puritan had also strong points of resemblance as well as strong points of difference. The New-England puritans were mild in their legislation; tender in their domestic relations; lenient to all crimes, save one; charitable to all sufferers; faithful guardians to the brute creation. The puritan thought himself the peculiar favorite of Heaven; for him alone Christ had died. His faith was pure, his morals stern and severe; he would not bow the knee to God, much less cringe to man. He valued human learning; but the Scriptures, and especially the Old Testament, was the golden rule of his life and conversation. Puritanism, like the common air, was breathed in our village, and, as it has been said of another place, "one might dwell there

from year to year, and not see a drunkard, nor hear an oath, nor meet a beggar.”*

Our puritan elder differed much from my father in opinion, and was rarely satisfied with any of his sermons. During the intermission on Sundays he sat apart, his attention fixed on a little pocket Bible ; never so intent, however, but he would observe and check the mirth of the children.

He, also, like Davie Deans, had a little Effie. She was a pretty little girl, his grand-daughter, and as he used to call her, the last lamb of his flock. She did not, like poor Effie, meet with that indulgence which became her ruin. She was strictly watched. The old man kept her close at his side, learning her catechism, while the other children were searching for birds' nests and flowers. The demure little girl sat with eyes fixed on her book, and her thoughts on the birds' nests and the flowers, watching and longing to escape from her penance and join the merry groups of children.

The old sexton was always one of the Sunday party. He was there to wait upon the

* For an eloquent character of the puritans of New-England, see Bancroft's History of the United States.

guests and receive his share of the repast. Next to my father, he was, I think, the most important person in the parish, at least in his own estimation. The pen of Scott would place him beside Adam Woodcock and Andrew Fair-service, as a worthy pendant. As I first remember him, he was a little old man past sixty, with flowing gray hair, a limp in his gait, caused by one leg being considerably longer than the other. He had little sharp features, disfigured with snuff and tobacco, although his expression was singularly comical. He had a most knowing wink when he shifted his tobacco from one cheek to the other, and his good nature was imperturbable.

My father's old clothes always descended to him, even to the three-cornered hat ; and as my father was twice his size, and the clothes were worn without alteration, his appearance on Sundays was most grotesque, when the only variations from a complete suit were gray yarn stockings and a reddish wig, surmounting, not covering his gray locks.

As soon as the minister reached the steps of the meeting-house he quitted the bell-rope, and preceding him up the aisle to the door of the

pulpit, he held it respectfully open till the clergyman was seated. With the old clothes and the cocked hat, he looked like a clever caricature of a well-dressed person.

He was one of those simple, idle, small-witted vagabonds, whom Providence seems to take special care of. It was his peculiar privilege to prepare the common place of repose for young and old, for the babe of a day and for the hoary head. But in so small a village, the travellers to their last homes were few and far between, so that the intervals of his time were spent in doing a turn here and there, fishing in the river, or sitting with a short, black pipe in his mouth in our chimney corner. Late in life, when he was past sixty, he married a young girl, and had a large family of children. They lived in the smallest of all cottages, or rather huts, in a little nook close by the bridge. We often visited them, for his wife, strange as it may seem, was a frail and delicate creature, almost overwhelmed with a troop of white-headed, barefooted boys. Their cottage consisted of one room, and that not a large one. The furniture was a "bed by night, a chest of drawers by day." The poor young creature,

to keep them from starving, toiled from morning till night, and almost always with a baby at her breast. Fortunately, he was paid a small sum as sexton, and the rest came from the neighbors. Poor, simple old man! He was living still, digging graves and smoking, when I left the parish, and the last hand I grasped was the hard and horny one of the sexton.

LETTER VI.

“ Her cap, far whiter than the driven snow,
Emblem right meet of decency does yield ;
Her apron dyed in grain as blue, I trow,
As is the harebell that adorns the field ;
And in her hand, for sceptre, she does wield
Two birchen sprays, with anxious fear entwined.”

SHENSTONE.

THE village dame, or school-mistress, claims a passing notice. Shenstone has described her as well as if she had been his familiar acquaintance. She dwelt in a little cottage close by the burying-ground ; her only neighbors, the quiet tenants of the graves. She was the sister of the former minister of our parish, and had kept the school for fifty years. She had seen her youth wither, her comeliness, if she ever had any, fade away, and had become gray, bent, and feeble in this humble employment. Her gifts must have been originally small, for her pupils never passed beyond the mysteries of reading and spelling, knitting and sewing, or, at the last,

the great achievement of a sampler. She was a hard-featured woman, and equally hard, stern, and severe in character. How could it be otherwise? Exercising absolute power, as she did, for six hours in the day, over twenty or thirty wayward and impatient spirits; and never having felt the softening influence of those affections so necessary to every woman's heart; never having listened to the sweet sound of mother, from the rosy lips of lisping infancy, the exercise of absolute power had hardened and roughened her mind, as the constant use of the hand, in bending stubborn and opposing substances, will harden and roughen the most fair and delicate. We held her in such absolute awe, that hardy indeed must have been the wight who could have braved her rod, or the still harder knuckles of her withered hand.

There sat, in that little apartment, the white-headed, barefooted little rabble, demure as bishops, and quiet as frightened birds, looking timidly at the rod that hung near her right hand, or with longing eyes at the hour-glass that stood on a little shelf at her left, waiting with restrained impatience for the last sands to fall, and then to lift the bar from the door, and rush out with wild shouts of liberty and joy.

This was the only school I ever entered, and this only for a short time.

“ For never in the long and tedious track
Of slavish grammar was I made to plod ;
No tyranny of rules my patience rack’d,
I served no ’prenticehood to any rod.”

Nature was my school-mistress. The trees were my relations, the flowers my children. The birds were like fairies, coming and going I know not whence, butterflies were winged messengers of joy, the winds were music to my ears, and the ocean, the deep and unfathomable ocean, was an all-pervading and infinite religion.

In the master of the district or grammar school, we possessed a teacher of a far higher order than our dame. He was a young man in whose character we all felt the deepest interest, from his morbid sensibility and his singular misfortune. He belonged to one of the best families in the country, had received the highest honors of the University, was an elegant and accomplished scholar, and possessed that delicacy and tenderness of temperament which attached his friends strongly and faithfully to him. Like most of the educated young men of the time, he was destined for the ministry, and was

pursuing the preparatory studies in the family of a clergyman. His companion was a young man of his own age, his most intimate friend, one who had been his chum in college, and they had lived together with an affection surpassing that of brothers.

One afternoon they were sitting in their study in the highest spirits. Our friend took up a pistol, and pointing playfully at his companion said, "Take care, I am going to shoot you." The other laughed and braved him to draw. Unhappily, the pistol was loaded with ball, it went off in his hand, and his friend was shot through the heart. He fell without uttering a word, and died with his eyes fixed on his friend, more expressive of anguish for him than of sorrow for his own fate.

The poor man became frantic. He lost his reason for many months, and when he recovered, he literally "never smiled again." He covered his face with a handkerchief, like a veil, and never took it off. At least his face was never seen by mortal, till the hour of his death. He could not, of course, enter the ministry, but as he was a rare scholar, and knew the classics by heart, he taught our school for many years, and fitted both my brothers for college.

Notwithstanding his melancholy, he was mild and gentle as a child. He never used birch enough in his school to make a broom, and did not adopt that ingenious method suggested by the author of that admirable book, "The Doctor," that where one extremity was too dense and solid to admit a sufficient quantity of Latin and Greek, it should be made, by repeated applications of the rod, to interpenetrate the other.

He was the most absent of men. I remember once he had strayed out into the fields after dinner, and, like parson Adams, with his *Æschylus* in his pocket. The afternoon passed insensibly away, and he did not think of returning till the sun was setting. The boys had gone as usual to the school-house, and had had an afternoon of frolic. As he approached the scenes of his labors, he met all the boys sallying out, and called them back to begin their afternoon studies. And until they pointed to the setting sun, he could not understand that his *Æschylus* had stolen his time of duty from him.

He was a man of deep religious sensibility, and of most tender feelings. I remember, as one of the little children was playing with him, and trying to enlarge a little hole there was in his handkerchief, to see, as she said, the color

of his eyes, we saw spots upon it as though tears were gushing out. We withdrew her from her sport, and my father forbade any further allusion to the subject. Although his piety was deep and sincere, he would never take any part in the family devotion, except as a listener, and he always declined even to ask a blessing at the table when my father was absent.

How deep must have been that wound—how intense the sensibility that could never again meet the human eye! although the expression of every eye, to one so truly penitent, must have been that of love and compassion. To the eye of Heaven, who sees what mortals cannot penetrate, his meekness, humility, and self-abasement must have gained their reward; and after his short life was finished, he may have joined that early friend, where their union will be eternal.

LETTER VII.

“Strange is it, that our bloods
Of color, weight, and heat, poured all together,
Would quite confound distinction—yet stand off
In difference so mighty.”

SHAKSPEARE.

BEFORE the Revolution, we had in our parish a person of more consequence than any I have yet described—no less than an English Baronet. Sir W. S. lived about two miles from our church, on a beautiful little peninsula running out into the sea, and bounded on the side next the village by our beautiful river. The usual approach to it was by descending the river in a boat. The house, which to me was a palace, was built on the point, a level, wooded headland. It was protected on the side towards the ocean by noble trees, while sunny slopes descended quite to the margin of the river on the other side. Here, in solitary grandeur, lived the noble and childless pair. Lady S. seldom passed over her threshold, except to take an

airing in her coach, and Sir W. S. suffered so much from ill health, that he took no part in country affairs. Sometimes, but not constantly, his powdered head and gold-laced coat were seen in the only curtained and cushioned pew in the meeting-house. He was a Tory, but he was a very good friend to my father, and frequently invited him to be his guest.

I was once the companion of one of his visits. We went down the river in the boat, and landed at the foot of a beautiful avenue of noble trees. When we reached the hall door, I was surprised to see my father take out a handkerchief and carefully wipe every particle of dust from his shoes. Observing my look of wonder, he said, "Lady S. was one of those exquisitely nice persons, who were offended by the soil of our mother earth." This, of course, prepared me for something very imposing.

On entering the parlor I thought it untenanted, but presently I saw emerging from behind a large embroidery frame a delicate little woman, whom I could have taken in my arms, although I was but a child. She received us with great courtesy, but her appearance was a little grotesque. She had not changed the fashion of her garments since she came to this country, in

the last year of the reign of George the First. At this time she was about sixty years old ; her hair, which was quite grey and thickly powdered, was combed entirely back from the face, and hung down in ringlets ; and, except that the materials were finer, her cap was the exact pattern of our old Hannah's. She wore a white satin petticoat, with hoops, and an open brocade gown with short sleeves, and deep cuffs of Flanders lace. The lowness of her stature, I suppose, was the reason that the heels of her satin shoes were four inches high.

The room was exquisitely neat. The andirons, of which the tops were large, perpendicular brass plates, eighteen inches in diameter, were dazzlingly bright ; and the windows, thickly curtained, gave me an idea of such exquisite comfort as I had never seen before. Lady S. pressed us to stay to dinner, which my father declined, but when we walked out to take leave, we found some one had taken away our boat ; we were compelled therefore to stay for its return, or accept the courtesy of the carriage to take us two or three miles round and across the bridge to our village. My father preferred the former, and we accordingly remained to dinner.

Sir W. S. did not appear till dinner was an-

nounced. I remember the dinner as if it were yesterday. Behind the chair of both master and mistress, stood a negro servant, both very old, with thin, woolly locks drawn out into a queue, and thickly powdered. They were dressed in black except their coats, which were of coarse, yellow cloth covered with blue lace. The whole service of the table was of silver, while water and ale were drank from large silver tankards. The noble host and hostess seemed sad and peevish, and, notwithstanding their splendor, I remember thinking they were not so happy as my father and myself.

While we were at dinner, a gentlemen, as I thought, came in to receive some order. He was dressed in white silk stockings and waistcoat, but with the same yellow coat, except that the materials were finer than that of the negroes. In my simplicity, I arose and dropped my little childish curtsy, at which my father first blushed, and then laughed. I found afterwards that he was the *maître d' hôtel*. At length our boat returned, and we went home, my young mind filled with wonder at the splendor I had witnessed. I have since had the honor of dining with an ex-king, but his splendor fell far

short of my childish recollections of my first dinner-party.

The baronet returned to England during the war, and bequeathed his library to my father. We had hitherto seen few books ; now we possessed uncounted treasures. Dominie Sampson did not stand longer on the steps of the library, lost in a book, than I did while they were removed and arranged. Among them, was Rapin's History of England, in folio, with plates ; Pope's Iliad and Odyssey ; but with the exception of this, there was no poetry in the library.

We now began to read aloud in the long evenings, and oh ! with what unworn delight we went through Pope's Homer, and all the Spectators, Tatlers, and Guardians. But the library contained, as I then thought, a treasure surpassing all these, and this was Sir Charles Grandison, and Clarissa, in ten or twelve octavo volumes. We had never read a novel. The world of fiction, except in the pages of John Bunyan, was to us an unknown country. My father objected to our reading Sir Charles Grandison. I believe he thought we should expect to find in after life such patterns of manly perfection among the living, and suffer from the disappointment. I think he was mistaken. I do

not believe I should have fallen in love with such a formal gentleman, even if he had been presented to me. I had even then imagined heroes much more attractive. We yielded to his wishes, and the book was most reluctantly consigned to the upper shelves. There was no such objection to *Clarissa Harlow*, and the successive volumes "smoothed the raven down of darkness till it smiled."

It would be impossible to describe the effect this wonderful book had upon me. *Clarissa*, in my warmed imagination, was no longer a mortal. She was a beautiful spirit. She had made herself a home in my heart. She was now loved, lost, and mourned, like a well known, a cherished friend.

The taste of novel readers, improved as it has been by Miss Edgeworth and Sir Walter Scott, would now find the long, minute, heavy descriptions, introductory to the principal events, extremely tedious. At that time they were to me like the avenue to a grand and noble structure, where every undulation of the ground, every tree, every minute flower and shrub, increased the interest of the sublime termination. It has been considered as almost an insuperable objection to *Clarissa*, that many of the scenes are indeli-

cate. True, they are. But the imagination of a young person must be already polluted, which could dwell upon such scenes, in connexion with the divine Clarissa. In spite of her heavy sorrows and terrible sufferings, there breathes around her the celestial purity of the Madonnas of Raphael. I have always thought, with Mrs. Grant of Laggan, that, out of the sacred volume, there is nothing half so affecting and sublime as the death-bed of Clarissa. Pardon this digression. I have wandered far from the subject with which I began, but, as I think, nearer to heaven.

It was strange that the baronet's library contained no copy of Shakspeare. Perhaps he took back with him to England this idol of his countrymen. I remember our first acquaintance with this favorite of nature. My father said it was the book to be studied next to the Bible. We had knit for him two complete undersuits of lamb's wool, and he said that his daughter's industry should not go unrewarded. He gave us some money which we sent to Boston to purchase a copy of Shakspeare. The treasure came in eight small volumes. They are now before me, old, black, worn, and disfigured, but I would not exchange them for the

most costly edition. Strange power of association ! I can never read Shakspeare in any other edition. The words *seem* not the same. They do not bring back, with the forest of Ardennes, the still more secluded woods of W. The sound of waves dying away on the beach is not in my ears, nor the gentle ripple of the soft-flowing river. Lear, and Hamlet, and Juliet, and Rosalind, are alive only in these little, black, worn volumes, and associated with the humble garret, where, at dawn or at evening twilight, I lost all personal interests, in the sorrows of that poor old man, and when Shakspeare opened to me a world

“ Too rich for use, for earth too dear.”

LETTER VIII.

“ Her eyes are wild, her head is bare,
The sun has burnt her coal-black hair;
She has a baby on her arm,
Or else she were alone.”

WE had in our village an exact counterpart of this touching ballad of Wordsworth's. She was a poor foolish young girl, half idiot, half insane, who had been cruelly wronged. She used to wander about with her baby in her arms; and long before I had ever heard of Wordsworth, she said to me, almost in his very words, “ that the infant's lips seemed to draw the fire from her brain, and the pain,” laying her hand on her heart, “ from here.”

“ Thy lips, I feel them, baby, they
Draw from my heart the pain away.”

This was the reason, perhaps, that she nursed him till he was a grown boy. The child, also, was an idiot; though, unlike idiot children, he was never violent, and always perfectly harmless.

The mother and grandmother of these wretched beings, was a poor, patient, uncomplaining sufferer. She lived in a little hovel, deep in the forest, to which the only entrance was through the untrodden paths of the greenwood. She supported herself and these two children, for the young mother was not twenty, by spinning flax and wool, with which she was furnished from our house. In the summer she gathered whortleberries, and in the autumn the fruit of the *myrica cerefera*, or bayberry, of which the beautiful green-colored and fragrant candles are made, that are often seen in the cottages of the country. The poor girl, after her child was born, could never settle to any employment. She wandered idly among the woods and hills, with her baby in her arms. Sometimes they would be gone several days and nights, and then the poor woman would come for my father to go and bring her back. Her mother had no control over her, but she was docile and obedient to my father, and indeed generally mild, except when any reproach was cast on her boy, then she was like the lioness in his defence.

This poor widow was one of many who supported themselves in the way I have mentioned, bringing their various articles to our house.

We never refused anything ; paying them, as we were able, in small quantities of tea, sugar, meal, and other necessaries. My father seldom gave them money—indeed, money was almost as scarce with ourselves as with them.

A salary of five hundred dollars, which was seldom wholly paid, could not go very far beyond the necessaries of life, yet I never thought we were poor ; we had food and raiment, the luxury of domestic love, and of relieving the wants of those poorer than ourselves. What more could we wish ? In one respect my father was rich. He never owed a sixpence. Though at his death he did not leave a dollar, not a cent was charged against him.

In a few cases my father had given or paid his poor parishioners a dollar, and they never parted with the gift. Long after his death, the same dollar was in their possession. Their practice was to pledge it at the little shop in the village for necessaries, and when they had earned from other persons enough to make up its value, they would redeem the dollar. When want urged, they would pledge it again, and thus, to their fond affections, it was the same piece of silver that had been the gift of their

beloved friend.* This was a humble anticipation of that useful modern institution, the Savings' Bank.

I remember one most affecting instance in which a poor woman was obliged to part with her dollar. It happened soon after the death of her friend. Her only son, a boy of fifteen, upon whom she depended for her support, had gone out in a little boat to fish. A sudden squall came on, and the poor boy was drowned. I never can forget the agonized screams of the mother, as she paced the beach that night! They almost silenced the wild roar of the breakers. At length I drew her home, and she passed the night at our fireside, in alternate faintings and hysterics. The body of the poor boy was washed on shore the next morning, and taken to his mother's cottage.

A new carpenter had come to the village, and when the coffin was brought home and to be paid for, he would take nothing but silver. He was a hard-hearted man, to whom she offered, in vain, her stores of yarn, and her bay tallow. When she could offer nothing else, she sat down and covered her head with her apron and sobbed aloud. I remember her saying, with a

* Facts.

touching pathos, that showed the forgetfulness of sorrow, "Ah, if Hal were here he would work for you, or fish for you, and soon pay the debt," as if the poor boy could have paid for his own coffin. At length the hoarded dollar was produced, and the man departed. How bitterly did I then regret that I had no money! If a hundredth part of what I have perhaps foolishly wasted since that day could have allowed the poor woman to keep her dollar, I could not then afford to give it. She soon followed her poor boy to that narrow house which had cost her so much sorrow. As I was watching with her one night during her last illness, only a few hours before her death, she asked me to read a psalm. On opening the Bible, I found carefully wrapped in paper, and placed between the leaves, the very same dollar. I took it up in silence, and I remember it called tears to my eyes, but I could not at such a moment ask her how she had found means to redeem it.*

* Fact.

LETTER IX.

“ We talked with open heart and tongue,
Affectionate and true ;
A pair of friends, though I was young,
And Matthew *ninety-two*.”

WORDSWORTH.

IN sketching the characters of our village, I must not omit one who held an elevated station in the humble society, and a firm and affectionate place in our hearts. This was the widow of the former minister, at this time enjoying a green old age, and attaching to herself, by her yet charming qualities, the veneration and love of all who knew her.

It is a mistake to imagine, that, to retain one's youth and vivacity, it is necessary to be a French woman and to live in Paris. The qualities of youth belong neither to climate nor nation. The attributes that belong to immortality are those that keep us young. Thought, imagination, affection, self-devoting love, can

never grow old. They are as youthful by the humble fireside of an American matron, as in the gay saloon of a Parisian spirituelle. The fires of many an illumination have faded away, but the constellations are as young as on the day they were created.

When my father succeeded the former minister and took possession of the parsonage, his widow removed to a little cottage at the foot of the hill. There, in the midst of her little vegetable garden, and surrounded by fragrance, which, as she was blind, she coveted rather than beauty, she lived to the great age of ninety years. But there was nothing visible of the usual decay of this winter of life. She presented a perfect picture of beautiful old age. Her hair, white as snow and silky as an infant's, was combed back from an almost unwrinkled forehead, and shaded by a lawn cap exquisitely plaited, and rivalling only the hair in whiteness. Indeed, she preserved, at this great age, much of the beauty for which she had been so remarkable in her youth. On looking closely at her dark blue eye, which had lost none of its brilliancy, one felt that the expression of a benign old age was wanting. She was blind. Her husband had been a great reader of Greek

and Hebrew. He loved to hear his favorite languages from the low, sweet voice of his wife ; and she, like Milton's daughters, read the words without understanding the sense, till her poor eyes were the sacrifice.

Her mind was stored with curious facts, and her anecdotes of earlier times in New England were inexhaustible. She was born in the vicinity of Boston, and was well acquainted with all the eminent men, her contemporaries. She had anecdotes of Governor Shirley and his young French wife, and kept up a correspondence, nearly to the close of her life, with some of the ministers in Boston.

Her life must have been marked by many sorrows. From her window she looked upon the graves of seven children. She lamented, when she became blind, that she could no longer see the place of their repose. Of double the number of grand-children, she had outlived all but one fair girl, the staff of her old age. Bereaved as she had been, in her presence one breathed only the transparent atmosphere of cheerful resignation and content. In looking back upon almost a century, she seemed to have erected, at every resting-place, only mon-

uments of the goodness of God, and to look on her afflictions as the passing cloud.

The child who lived with her was the youngest daughter of her favorite son. She was a fair, delicate girl of sixteen. I scarcely ever saw a more lovely young creature. If it be true, as travellers have said, that our young countrywomen surpass those of Europe in delicate and feminine beauty, Grace would have been distinguished even among the fairest. But they pay dearly for this distinction. The delicacy of their appearance bears fearful testimony to the frailty of their constitutions.

Perhaps there is no class of females, beneath the highest, who endure so little labor and fatigue, and yet their early worn and faded appearance, and the small number of old women seen among them, is a certain indication that something must be wrong. I am sensible the reason we see so few old persons is to be attributed, in some degree, to the comparative thinness of our population. Besides, in Europe the habits of the people are out-of-door habits. In the southern part of Europe every old woman goes out to enjoy the warmth of the noon-day, and quicken her creeping blood in the beams of the sun. In Catholic countries,

gathered about the steps of the convents are only the old, infirm, and decrepid ; and when I have seen them receiving their soup and broken bread at the wicket, I have often asked, Where are the young and the healthy? Our old women hide themselves from the “gairish eye of day ;” they bury themselves in comfortable arm-chairs in the chimney-corner, or creep into the most retired nook in their bed-rooms.

To return from this digression upon the small number of my contemporaries to their queen, my poor friend of ninety years and her lovely grandchild. They presented one of those beautiful adaptations of Providence often existing, but seldom observed, where those little daily and hourly attentions of active youth, in this case rendered doubly important by the blindness of the old, are repaid by the affectionate counsel, the gathered wisdom, and the protecting love of age. To use a common simile, Grace was the beautiful vine, sheltering and ornamenting the broken tree that gave *her* strength and support.

Connected with this fair girl was a story of true love, which interested me deeply at the time in life when all love bears the character of romance. As half a century has since passed,

and the grave has closed over all concerned, and buried alike their faults and their sorrows, I may be permitted, if your indulgence will pardon me, to give you a sketch of it without wounding the memory of any. But this requires another letter.

LETTER X.

“ Alas ! her gentle nature was not made
To buffet with adversity.”

I HAVE already mentioned the extreme delicacy of the appearance of Grace. This she inherited from her grandmother's family, who had nearly all died in consumption. It was increased, no doubt, by her constant attendance on a person so aged. Extreme youth and extreme old age should not dwell much together. The warm, close air requisite to the comfort of age is poison to youth. Youth, with its bounding blood and gay spirits, longs for the free, bracing air, which would congeal to ice the creeping blood of age. Circumstances, therefore, prepared the way for the early decline of this young girl.

Rosalind says, “ Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but never for love.” Shakspeare knew the human heart too well to say that woman never died for love.

Many, many are the women who have shrunk away into solitude to hide the disappointment of long cherished hopes, to tent the wound, or to draw out the barbed arrow of heartless desertion, and have died in the struggle. It is too common an occurrence, almost too trite a remark to venture upon. I acknowledge there is usually some predisposing cause, some weakness of constitution that insidiously aids the enemy; but where this is not the case, the robust and strong may suffer only a heart-break, and "brokenly live on." If my story were not too true, I would not relate it.

Among the widows of our parish, there was one much superior in manners and education to the society in which she lived. I do not remember the early history of Mrs. R——, but I believe she had removed to our village, on the death of her husband, from one of the southern cities. She had an only child, a son, to whom she was devoted with all that exclusive fondness so common under such circumstances. He was worthy of his mother's love, and repaid it with thoughtful steadiness, devotion to his studies, and tender attachment to her. He was educated at Cambridge, and had just left the University when the war of Independence com-

menced. Like other ardent young men, he resolved to devote himself to the service of the country. I remember he was much urged not to enter the army, but he shared the enthusiasm of the time, and marched off with several other young men of the parish. Perhaps it is not remembered that Washington was in the habit of writing to the clergymen of the different parishes, and stating, with simple eloquence, the wants of the army. My father received several such letters. I have them now. I would not exchange them for their weight in diamonds. After receiving one of them, he used to preach a sermon on the duty of patriotism, describing the destitution, but the patriotic energy of the army, and the perplexity of its beloved commander. The next day half a dozen young fellows would march off to aid the defenders of the country, serve a season, and then come home again to the plough and the fireside.

To return — I should have said before, that in the family of Mrs. R—— had been brought up from her infancy a niece of about the same age with her son, who had been treated in all respects like a daughter. Alice was a pretty girl, fresh and fair as a rose; engaging in her

manners, which partook a little of the gaiety and buoyancy of her spirits. She was sometimes called the prettiest girl in the parish, and might have passed for such, where pretty girls were much more plenty. As these two young people had been much together, an attachment had grown up between them; on the part of Henry R—— it was that of habit, and what Miss Edgeworth would call propinquity, but with Alice it was of the most ardent character. He was not aware of its depth or character; and when he parted to join the army, although her tears and depression might have betrayed her to a man of more vanity and self-love, Henry thought it was only the common sensibility of woman.

R—— entered the army as an ensign; he studied the profession with diligence, devoted himself with ardor to the cause, and soon rose to the rank of captain. He had been in the southern division of the army about three years, had seen much severe service, when his health, owing to the climate and great fatigue, became injured, and he obtained leave to come home and repair his exhausted strength. I remember the joy of his return; his mother and cousin saw, with inexpressible pride and joy, the

improvement in his person and manners. He had been a timid, bashful youth; he was now a self-possessed, though modest young man. A military air, and the severe duties of his profession, had given a manliness and dignity to his appearance which commanded respect as well as love. We were all charmed with our hero, and innumerable little amusements were planned by the three families to do him honor.

During the three years of his absence, our little Grace had grown from a pale, sickly-looking child, to a delicate, lovely young woman. I have often observed this change to take place in children of weak constitution. They seem like those rare plants born to bloom but once and then wither away. She was now scarcely sixteen, fair as a lily. Her eyes were a dark hazel, and her silken hair of the palest auburn. Blue veins wandered over her fair temples and snowy throat, while every passing emotion brought a faint color to her usually pale cheek—

“Like day’s last blush reflected from a field of snow.”

She was exactly the character to captivate a soldier. Timid, modest, self-distrustful, she was like a tender flower, to be cherished in the

bosom, and shielded from even the winds of heaven. Oh! it is dear to the pride of man to protect, to support the clinging flower.

“The plant that they tend is the plant that they love.”

The evening previous to Captain R——’s return to the army, I was sitting with our venerable old friend when the three young people came in. Grace and Captain R—— were soon after conversing apart in a very low voice, when, with the usual acute sensibility to sound that characterizes the blind, she observed how much the tones of their voices were alike. I had not observed it, but now they both started and blushed deeply. The truth flashed on my mind,—and, as Alice afterwards told me, it did at the same moment on hers, and seemed like the point of an arrow to pierce her heart.

The young people went home with me, as Captain R—— wished to take leave of my father, as he was the next day to return to the army to which he had been suddenly recalled. As they stood at the door, Alice said, “You shall have something to remind you of this last evening,” and ran to the garden to gather him some roses. He seized the opportunity to take Grace’s hand. They both stood in the deepest embarrassment. “I thought,” said he, “to

have spoken to you, I thought to have told you how dear beyond all price is this little hand, but I cannot, I must write, you will not refuse to read." Grace trembled, and the faint color in her cheek had deepened to crimson. At this moment Alice appeared from the garden with her hand full of roses. He raised the hand of Grace to his lips. Alice saw it. She became deadly pale, and trembled so much that she was obliged to take the arm of her cousin as she walked home.

So far I was a witness of this little romance. The particulars that follow were told to me by Alice long afterwards, when she was laid on that sick bed from which she thought she should never rise again.

They reached their home without a word having been spoken by either. Alice had forgotten the roses; they hung unconsciously in her hand. She gained her own room, bolted the door, threw herself into a chair, and burst into that agony of bitter tears that woman sheds but once. Yes, the tears that flow for the first disappointment of the affections surpass in bitterness all others. 'These are not the holy drops that in after life purify the source of tears. A mother's grief flows from a deeper, a

purser fountain. These are made up of mortification, pride, humiliation, and anger, and as they mingle with the softer streams, they desolate and indurate the heart. Remorse alone can add to their exceeding bitterness, — the grace of God only can make them the means of purifying the character.

At length she became more calm. The fabric of her hopes lay shattered in the dust ; but who had raised this fair fabric, and who had dashed it to the ground ? In looking back on all the passages of their intercourse, Alice could not fix on a single word or look of R——'s that had evinced more than the affectionate interest of a brother or a cousin. She repeated many things he had said, vainly trying to imagine the *tone* more tender than the words. In walking, did he not always offer *her* his arm, while Grace walked on the other side ? Did he not always chat and laugh with *her*, stealing only a timid glance under Grace's bonnet. She now recollected that he had asked her a thousand questions about Grace, and seemed to delight to dwell on every trifle relating to her character, her occupations, and habits. Her pillow that night was steeped in tears. A change came over the spirit of her dream. She

found that she had herself created the beautiful phantom that had now melted away into thin air. The first twittering of the early birds found her still awake. Oh, how painful to those who have passed a night of sleepless sorrow is the first faint sound of the happy, waking birds! It comes before the dawn, and brings the thought of the early, dewy morning, the gradually unfolding light, the leaves stirred by the summer wind, and at length the rising of the glorious day. All this came over Alice, contrasted with her own misery, and she buried her head in the bed-clothes, vainly hoping to shut out the agony of her own spirit.

At length she arose, and after collecting her thoughts as much as possible, she descended to the parlour. Captain R—— was already gone, and his mother had accompanied him to the nearest seaport, where he was to embark and join the army at the South. She was glad to be alone, but her agitation the night before had prevented her from learning this arrangement. On the table was a note addressed to herself, enclosing a letter for Grace. It expressed in warm terms his admiration of Grace, entreated his cousin to become his advocate with her friend, and to ascertain a point the dearest

on earth to his happiness, which his sudden recall had prevented him from securing. Alice thought it was what she had expected ; but hope had lingered still, and she was unprepared for such a blow. Her eye took in the meaning of the note, the certainty of the death of her hopes came over her, the letter fell from her hand, and she sank down in a state of insensibility. When consciousness returned, the letter and note lay at her feet. She shut her eyes, to banish the sense of misery. But in vain, — Grace would probably soon call, and she must prepare to meet her with firmness.

Happy would it have been for Alice, if at this moment she had known the love of a mother or of a faithful friend. She was assailed by strong temptation, she should have flown to God ; and in that communion she would have found herself strengthened and protected. Instead of humbly praying, “Lead me not into temptation,” she began to reason. Her principles, weaker than her reason, were written on the sand, and soon effaced by the waves of passion. Grace, thought she, cannot feel as I do. Henry is to her only the acquaintance of a day, while to me he has been the cherished companion of a life. They are ignorant of my love

for him. If they knew it, would they oppose a transient feeling to the happiness of my whole future life? But she does not love him. I have never seen the smallest sign of love. If she did love, she is so confiding, would she not have told me all? Henry fancies she loves him, because she is so gentle, so tender, that she loves every living thing; even the birds do not fly from her. To her he has never spoken of love. And then, though she did not use the words of the poet of nature, the same thought was in her mind —

“He that is robbed, not knowing what he has lost,
Let him not know it, and he’s not robbed at all.”

How dangerous to admit false premises in reasoning! It is even more dangerous than *one* false step in morals. A false step can be retraced and the true path found; but to take the wrong direction, and persist in following it, flattering ourselves that it will at last come out right, can lead us only to shame and misery.

She took up the letter. It was sealed with the emblem of hope. Was there, then, hope for all but her? What if this letter had been entrusted to a faithless messenger? What if the

letter should never reach Grace? All would be as it was before. Grace would be unconscious of any loss. She would not in fact suffer any loss. The thought had taken possession of her mind; she could not banish it. She threw the letter from her, and read again her own note. It was almost tender. What would be the effect on Henry did he believe that Grace was cold to his suit, and returned no answer to his letter? Oh, he would come back to her, and she would repay him with a whole life of devoted tenderness for this little deception. She took up the letter again. She heard a footstep,—it might be Grace. She could not meet her now,—she crushed the letter and the note together in her hand and then threw them behind the fire.

The footstep passed on — it was not Grace — a mist seemed to come before the eyes of Alice, and the room was suddenly dark. She pressed both hands on her forehead, and remained long without motion or consciousness. At last she walked slowly to the window and threw up the sash. She felt as if there were an eclipse. The sun appeared to be darkened, the whole face of nature changed. She smelt the damask

rose that grew near the window. The fragrance appeared to be gone. It was not what it used to be. She turned away and thought she was walking in a dream. She tried to awaken herself. Alas! She could not bring back her former self. Her innocence was gone.

LETTER XI.

“ Cette vie n’a quelque prix que si elle sert à l’ éducation religieuse de notre cœur.”

MADAME DE STAEL.

PERHAPS you will think it strange, my dear friend, that Captain R. should have left his fate undecided to the very last evening of his visit, and then have departed without the certainty of securing his happiness. But he had never been a despairing lover. Grace was too artless, too simple-hearted, to conceal the delight his attentions gave her. He felt certain he possessed the treasure of her love, and like a miser he wished to dwell on it in secret, to be conscious of his happiness without imparting the enjoyment. He loved to see the timid blush steal into the cheek of Grace when he approached her, to see her eyes fill with tears when he told of the dangers he had escaped and those he must meet again, and to mark the sudden paleness of her cheek when he talked of soon joining the army and fronting them again.

To Grace within the last two months had been comprised the happiness of years ; indeed, until now she thought she had never lived. She had changed in one short week from a timid, reserved child, to a thinking, reflecting woman. She had been before a beautiful statue ; the fire stolen from heaven had touched her, and she was now a loving, confiding woman. The evening, therefore, that he had whispered his love, and promised to write to her, had only realized her dream of joy, and given her the “ sober certainty of waking bliss.” She ran down the short path that divided her home from ours, with so light a heart, so quick a step, that even her blind grandmother penetrated her secret, and drew from her a timid confession of her happiness. That night, she, too, was sleepless, but it was from agitation and joy. She was humble and self-distrustful. She was unconscious of her own personal charms, and like Miranda, she could have wept at her own unworthiness. Her impulses were all from heaven and nature, she knew nothing of the conventions of the world and its vanities, and that Captain R—— should make her the partner of his heart and his fortunes was almost too much happiness to bear. Her cup was full,

— with fervent, simple gratitude, she poured out her thanks to God —

“ Till like a shutting flower her senses close,
And on her lies the beauty of repose.”

A womanly feeling prevented Grace from going the next day to see Alice. She remained at home, expecting the promised letter. When the day had passed, and it did not come, she thought she should certainly hear when his mother came from Boston. Travelling, at that time, was slow and uncertain ; she waited, therefore, many days, with “ that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick.” As soon as she heard of Mrs. R——’s return, she flew to the house, and blushing “ rosy red,” asked for her letter. “ I brought no letters from Boston,” was Mrs. R——’s quiet reply. The eye of Grace penetrated every part of the room where a letter could be placed, and as soon as she was alone with Alice, she held out her hand, saying, “ Do not trifle with me, — do not tease me, — give me the letter ? ” “ I have no letter,” said Alice, faintly, and without looking up, — “ at least, none for you. Henry wrote a few lines to me, but there was no *note* for you.” Grace did not speak again. There was an embarrassed silence. Oh, thought Alice, she does

not love him ; if she did, she would not take it so quietly. If she had not herself been blinded by her own selfish passion, she would have seen that Grace was deadly pale, and that as she moved towards the door, her limbs could scarcely support her. She would have felt that at that moment she had most assuredly dealt her a death-blow ; that in consequence of her cruel treachery, the life of Grace would as surely be the sacrifice, as she had seen the fatal letter pass quickly to ashes.

Grace walked slowly home. It was the beginning of June, when the New-England spring has attained its utmost beauty. To her, the trees, the flowers, the skies seemed suddenly clothed in mourning. Her dream of happiness had vanished. The beautiful gourd, under whose shadow she had hoped to dwell, had grown up in a night, but it had withered in the morning. She knew that her little world had changed forever, that her sun had gone down, and that the beautiful hues of hope had faded, and the night had settled down with "darkness that might be felt." It is a mistake to suppose that gentle and timid characters are incapable of receiving a lasting impression. The wax, that melts the most readily, takes

most perfectly the impression of the seal. The diamond, the hardest substance in nature, has existed before in the delicate essence that gives color to the flowers.

When Grace reached home, the quick ear of her grandmother detected the change in her footstep. She had answered some trivial question, when she called her to her, and folding her in her aged arms, "I trusted," said she, "that God would have taken me to himself before I had heard that tone of anguish in your voice." She felt that her cup, which had been filling for almost a century, could contain yet one more drop of bitterness.

But why, you will ask, did not Captain R—— inquire after the fate of a letter so important to his happiness? He was immediately engaged in the most active and busy scenes of the war; the communication of letters was at that time also so uncertain, that although he wrote several times, his letters did not reach their destination. Like most young men who have only a superficial knowledge of women, he concluded, when he received no answer to his letter, that Grace was one of those frivolous young women who do not know their own minds, — that she was pleased with his attention when he was

present, but that some other fancy occupied her as soon as he was away. He knew not, he saw not, that her cheek became every day thinner ; that the beauty of her eye was faded ; and that the weary, heavy step that carried her every post day to the office to inquire for letters, became at length so feeble that she could no longer cross the threshold. This change did not come on suddenly ; it was imperceptible, except to those who rarely saw her ; and, even when she became alarmingly ill, as the guilty secret was confined to the breast of Alice, it was thought to be only the usual progress of that insidious disease that had carried off all her family.

More than a year had passed, when Mrs. R—— was informed, by an express, that her son was severely wounded, and was coming home to be nursed and to recover his health. He remained at home two or three months. During this time, Alice was his constant companion and his mother's most efficient aid in nursing. She read to him, talked to him, and helped him to bear with patience the long, weary hours of convalescence. As it was in the middle of winter, and Grace was a close prisoner to the house, she, probably, was scarcely

mentioned in his presence. His pride had been wounded by her fancied coldness, and he had, himself, lost much in the esteem of our village by what was supposed his neglect of this, its fairest flower. The subject was, of course, avoided by the few persons who saw him, and he remained ignorant of the ruin he had undesignedly wrought. It was not strange that a grateful attachment to his devoted nurse should soon take the place, in his heart, of one which he thought unrequited ; that he should see a thousand charms before invisible ; and that, as the hour of separation drew near, he should entreat, that, at the close of the war, she would unite her fate with his, never again to be divided.

Was Alice happy when the object for which she had sacrificed principle, conscience, friendship, and almost heaven, was attained ? We saw her very little, but when we did meet, there was a strange excitement in her manner. Her eye was restless, she could not meet a steady gaze. She withdrew herself from all confidential intercourse. Her spirits were flighty, rather than cheerful, and her whole heart dwelling on the termination of the war, to which event, indeed, the wish and prayer of

every heart was directed. She rarely visited Grace. She could not bear the sight of the ruin her treachery had wrought.

I passed much time with my poor old friend during this dreary winter, and was sitting by the couch of Grace when she was told of the approaching marriage of Captain R—— with Alice. A faint smile passed over her faded countenance. She did not speak, but two burning tears coursed down her cheeks, and from that hour she was evidently worse.

Before her death, deep religious affections had taken the place in her heart of earthly passion. But this had been the work of time. It is not when the heart is crushed with such a blow as hers, that it can turn readily to God. We forget that God works by second causes, and the affliction seems to come, not from his wisdom, but from the injustice of man, and the word, Duty, has lost its meaning. But when time has taken away the sense of injury, religion combines with its gentle influences to open all the heavenward affections; and in the heart that has been mellowed and quickened by earthly love the seed is sown, that, nurtured and refreshed by spiritual influences, bears the blessed fruit of a holy, heavenly love.

But the day of retribution was at hand, and it came like a flash of lightning from a summer sky. Captain R—— had been one of the most exemplary young officers in the army. He was with that detachment, led by Lafayette, which suffered so much for want of clothes, and were supplied by the generosity of the noble Frenchman. He had been promoted to the rank of Colonel, and was a favorite with Washington. All his wishes had been attained, when, in the very moment of victory, at the siege of Yorktown, he fell, mortally wounded.

When the news of his death reached our village, by a letter from Washington's own hand to his mother, the exultation for the victory was changed into mourning for his loss. My father, who thought first of his poor mother, was just leaving home to visit her, when a messenger came entreating him to hasten, for they feared Alice was dying. When we arrived at the house, the mother's sorrow was forgotten, in the more intense affliction of her who had always been to her like a second child.

We found Alice stretched on the bed, apparently without life or motion. Her hair was damp and matted around her face, her lips and cheeks perfectly colorless, except a circle of

deep crimson around the eyelids. One hand was laid on the wrist of the other. She was apparently counting the pulses, wishing and hoping that death would come and relieve her from her agony. Alas! she was young and full of strength. Death will not come at our call. Many long days, many long years must she suffer, before sorrow can tame that bounding pulse, or chill that beating heart.

My father sat down by the bedside and took her hand in his. She did not raise her eyes, but appeared unconscious of his presence. He then whispered softly to her, — “Turn to God and he will turn to thee.” She took no notice, her eyes remained fixed, though she apparently saw nothing. At length he said, “Jesus came to bind up the broken heart, to speak peace to the troubled conscience.” She sighed, and her lips moved as though she would have said, “My case is beyond his reach.” After a pause, my father whispered again, “Much has been forgiven her, for she has loved much.” He had touched the right cord, the blood rushed to her lips and cheeks, her breast heaved, and she burst into tears. She wept long with unrestrained emotion. No word was

spoken as we sat in that chamber of sorrow, the mother now almost as much an object of sympathy as the daughter. At length Alice suffered herself to be undressed and put to bed. I sat by her all night. She had many returns of her agony, when, no doubt, her severest suffering was from the remembrance of the deep injury she had inflicted on poor Grace.

Her illness lasted many weeks, and her recovery was slow and doubtful. But when she rose from that bed of sorrow and penitence, she was an altered creature. Her gaiety was gone forever, — but her character had taken a tone of self-denying virtue, that atoned, if any thing could atone, for her former sin. Upon the death of Grace, which took place a few months after we had heard of that of Colonel R——, she devoted herself to the poor bereaved grandmother, who had now become entirely helpless. Her attentions soothed the last hours, and supported the aged Christian as she descended to the welcome of the waiting grave. Afterwards, she paid all the duties of an only child to her adopted mother, and cheered the sad evening of her declining life.

The particulars I have now made known

were related to me by Alice during her illness. When I asked my father how he could adapt his conversation at the time of her illness so exactly to her case, he said he had long thought she was suffering from pain connected with a wounded conscience, though he knew nothing of the circumstances. This had escaped me, inexperienced as I was, at that time, in human sorrows.

LETTER XII.

“ Heart-chilling superstition ! thou canst glaze
Even pity’s eye with her own frozen tear.”

COLERIDGE.

You complain, my dear friend, that my story is too sad. I am sorry it is too true a tale, — I did not add a single circumstance to its tragic character.

Our aged friend, whom I have mentioned so often, was born in the near neighborhood of the famous Salem witchcraft, and as she was a child of four years old when this delusion passed through the land, and heard much about it in her youth, she remembered many of the traditions, and used to relate melancholy circumstances connected with the victims of this “ heart-chilling superstition.”

The subject has been so thoroughly investigated, that, reasoning from well known principles of human nature, it is now easy to understand what was then so mysterious. An eloquent writer has said, “ The most melancholy

reflection suggested by this awful history is, that those *only* suffered, whose principles were so strong, that even the fear of death, combined with the love of life, could not persuade them to utter a falsehood.”*

One relation of the old lady’s interested me deeply, particularly as it was one of those in which “the fear of death, combined with the love of life,” could not induce the victim to swerve from her integrity, or violate her conscience, to save her life.

In her native village there were two orphans, who, on the death of their parents, depended on the bounty of some distant relatives. The eldest, a girl, was several years older than her brother, a poor sickly boy, who relied solely on his sister for those necessary attentions that seemed often to preserve his life. They had eaten, for many years, the bitter bread of dependance, when the persecuting spirit, in the form of the witchcraft delusion, awoke in the land. This young girl, now about eighteen, was dis-

* “Those, who would confess themselves guilty of intercourse with the Devil, were pardoned. Fifty-five persons made such confession.” See Upham’s *Lectures on Witchcraft*.

tinguished by remarkable maturity of character, and also by a perfection of form and feature, as rare as it was beautiful. It is well known that the victims of this delusion were selected among those who were distinguished by rare gifts of mind or person, and even the persons most eminent for piety and excellence of character were the most likely to become accused of intercourse with the Author of Evil.

Tradition, said our grandmother, represented Miriam Power as queenly in her person, of most winning sweetness in countenance and manner, although mingled with sadness and reserve. This sadness was attributed to the early loss of her parents, and to the anxiety and care which had fallen upon her at that early age in the protection of her unfortunate brother. He was afflicted with that fearful malady, epilepsy. It is now well known, that, although a physical disease, it will yield to mild remedies and moral treatment. She had, in this way, or by the natural ascendancy which a strong mind exercises over a weak one, attained a perfect control of her idiot brother. She had watched him so long, and become so accustomed to the care, that although she could not foresee and prevent the paroxysm of the malady, yet as

soon as consciousness began to return, by fixing her eye mildly on his, and taking him in her arms, she could immediately soothe him to quiet and sleep.

As usual in such cases, every one was ready with advice, and there were as many remedies offered as there were persons to prescribe ; but Miriam had learnt from experience that her own treatment was the best, and refused all herbs, nostrums, and charms.

Among the most earnest was an old Indian squaw, who had long been the doctress of the village, who entreated Miriam to make use of a woodchuck *baked alive* and then reduced to powder, taken in small doses every day. The cruel prescription was rejected with horror, and the poor girl went quietly on in her own way.

Soon after the accusations for witchcraft began, either incited by those who envied the beauty and talent of Miriam, or urged by anger at the rejection of her advice, this old Indian accused the poor girl of first throwing her brother into fits, and then bringing him out of them by the assistance of the Devil. It is well known how readily the people, and even the magistrates, lent an ear to such accusations.

All, who would not acknowledge a compact with the Evil One, felt that they were lost as soon as they were accused.

Poor Miriam knew instantly that her fate was sealed, when one morning in August the officer entered her little room where she was sitting by her brother, and told her he had come to take her to prison. She turned pale as death, but, with that trust in God which was habitual to her, she entreated permission to retire, to commend herself and her brother to Heaven. When she returned, she was calm, and asked with much firmness who were her accusers, and demanded to be confronted with them. When they tore her from her weeping brother her fortitude forsook her, and she entreated with tears that he might be permitted to go with her to prison. Her prayer was not granted, and the poor idiot knew not the calamity he was suffering.

In cases like these, the cruelty of their proceedings was only exceeded by their rapidity. The next day Miriam was taken from prison and carried to Salem for examination. These examinations took place in the church, and were conducted with the mockery of a religious solemnity. The meeting was opened with

prayer by the clergyman, the accused was then brought in and placed between two men, who each held an outstretched arm, so that she could touch nothing in her vicinity. No relative or friend was permitted to perform this office, not even husbands when their own wives were the accused.

Miriam, on this awful occasion, had not wholly neglected her dress, but her beautiful long hair hung loosely about her neck and shoulders. She was deadly pale, cold drops of agony stood upon her forehead ; but there was a light in her dark eye that said, whatever might be her fate, she would be true to her principles, and that neither the longing for life, in one so young, nor the fear of a cruel death, would wring from her one false word.

The Indian was now placed before her. She was old, bent, withered ; and there was a malignant expression in her snake-like eye, which contrasted with the calm innocence of Miriam's, like that of a fiend of darkness opposed to an angel of light. She testified that she had repeatedly seen the accused throw her brother into fits, and then with a look or a touch instantly restore him again to tranquillity. She gave clear and circumstantial evidence of many

instances which she had witnessed, and called upon others to confirm her testimony.

Miriam felt that there was scarcely a ray of hope, but she lifted her heart to God, the protector of the orphan, and entreated to be heard in her own defence. She gave a clear and lucid relation of her brother's illness, which had afflicted him from his birth. She told them that her mother had bequeathed him to her care on her death-bed, and she gave a touching account of all her long watchings, her anxious days and nights, the various remedies she had used, from time to time, till, at last, she had found out the soothing moral influence by which she could alone mitigate his sufferings.

Her youth, her beauty, her humility, and the tone of her voice, moved the crowd to pity. Mercy seemed hovering over the hearts of her judges; when it was suggested by one of them to have the boy brought and placed before her, that they might themselves witness her power. Her safety now depended on an accident. If he should chance to bear the experiment tranquilly, and no convulsion ensue, the evidence of the Indian would scarcely have been deemed sufficient to condemn her.

When they went for the boy, they found he had

been weeping ever since his sister was taken away, but he had not intelligence enough to comprehend the nature of the case, or to know how much depended on his tranquillity. When informed that he was to be taken to his sister, he expressed the utmost joy and eagerness to proceed. Miriam heard him coming, and trembled so excessively, that one of the men was obliged to support her with his arm from falling to the ground.

The poor boy expected to see his sister as he had always seen her, calm, firm, and smiling gently on him. When he was brought into the crowded meeting-house, and saw the stern and solemn faces of the magistrates, his beloved guardian pale as death, a prisoner between two savage men, he was seized with the most intense terror, uttered a piercing shriek, and fell down at her feet in strong convulsions.

Although her life depended on it, Miriam could resist no longer. She struggled violently, drew her arms with a powerful effort from the men who held her, and threw herself by the side of her agonized brother. She raised him in her arms, wiped the froth from his mouth, and pressed him closely to her bosom. He opened his eyes, saw the mild, the beloved, the

well known countenance fixed tenderly upon him, instantly became calm, nestled like an infant on her breast, and soon fell asleep.

The iron-hearted judges, unmoved by a scene that brought tears to many eyes, cried out, "We need no other proof that the agency of the Evil One is among us. The most winning forms are often chosen for his agents. Unless she will acknowledge *his aid*, take her to prison and give her over to his power."

Miriam fell upon her knees, and in the presence of the crowd abjured all aid, compact, intercourse with any spirit of evil. She acknowledged but one, the Father of all spirits, and to him she committed the cause of the orphan and the innocent. Her brother clung to her, and she refused again to be separated from him. They were left together in the prison. The poor boy, whose life she had so often saved, was unconscious that he had now been the means of condemning his guardian to death.

Are you interested enough in my heroine to wish to know her fate? She had prepared herself by faith and prayer for the cruel death which she knew awaited her. But there were in the crowd, at her trial, hearts made of softer materials than those of her inexorable judges.

When they found that no entreaties could prevail on her to save her life by a falsehood, they determined, by some other means, to work out her deliverance.

One morning her prison was found empty. No inquiries were instituted, and no pursuit was made. It was afterwards found that she had fled to Boston, where, with her own industry, she supported herself and her unfortunate brother.

I have often wished I could have known her future destiny in life. Her remarkable beauty and heroic conduct could not have remained unknown. An American Scott would find many a Jeanie Deans among the daughters of the Pilgrims.

LETTER XIII.

“ We still have slept together ;
Rose at an instant, learn’d, play’d, eat together ;
And wheresoe’er we went, like Juno’s swans,
Still we went coupled, and inseparable.”

SHAKSPEARE.

THERE were some relatives of my mother’s in Boston, who had frequently invited their “country cousins” to visit them. As they urged their request with great apparent sincerity, my father at last consented to spare my sister for a few months in the winter of 178—. We were exactly of a size, and as we knew nothing of *meum* and *teum*, there could be culled from our limited wardrobes articles enough to allow my sister to make a respectable, though I fear a terribly old fashioned appearance in the capital. She wrote to us often during her absence. A large bundle of her letters are now before me, which for half a century have remained untouched. Who can bear to read old letters ; the records of the

cold, the faithless, and the dead? Even the outsides, yellow and discolored as they are, excite a thousand thronging, overpowering recollections. Here is one on which my little sister drew a pattern for needle-work, as we sat around our little table in our happy parlor, — another, upon which the same ready pencil has sketched a caricature of a visiter who was not a favorite. A third, upon which my dear father drew the path, to direct us to a certain spot in the forest, where we could find the yellow cypripedium; and here are others with names upon them, which the winters of seventy years have not been able to efface from my heart.

The first of my sister's letters gives a sketch of Boston in the latter part of the last century, and I will give it to you without omission.

“ Dear —, After I parted with you all, that cold morning, my journey was rather melancholy. I could not help feeling, that perhaps I ought not to have left all my domestic cares to you, and that I should be missed, even more than you imagined. At the end of the second day we arrived in Boston. Mrs. — received me most kindly, and inquired much for our dear father. I was very weary and soon re-

tired to bed. The next morning I arose at my usual hour and went down. The servant was just kindling a fire in the parlor, and as he told me breakfast would not be ready for two hours, I was obliged to go back to my room and cover myself with the bed-clothes, thinking of the cheerful faces around the breakfast table in our comfortable little parlor at home.

“After the quiet of so many years, Boston is to me a very confused and noisy place. Last night I went to a ball at —— house. I was much afraid my appearance would be very old-fashioned, for you know our *company* dress was made out of our mother’s wedding gown. I dressed myself, however, as neatly as possible, with the fine lawn handkerchief which is trimmed with Mecklin lace on my neck, but I was much surprised to see all the ladies with bare shoulders, and dresses of a very different fashion. I believe my appearance excited some ridicule, for I saw a smile on many faces. The master of the house immediately approached me, and conversed in the kindest manner till I had recovered from my embarrassment, and then requested me to join the dance. I was afraid I should be very awkward, as our little knowledge of dancing, you know, was taught

by the poor lame French soldier whom my father sheltered so long by the kitchen fire. I soon, however, forgot every thing else in the delight of the dance. I danced the whole evening, and though I was never at a ball, as you know, before, I was insensible of any fatigue. We did not get home till two o'clock, — what will my father say to that ?

“ Oh, dearest, I have been to the theatre, or rather to the moral lecture, as they have named it here. You know when we have been reading Shakspeare, how we have longed to see one of his plays performed. This was not Shakspeare, but a very amusing play, called the ‘ School for Scandal.’ The next day I dined at Mrs. K——’s, at dinner I sat next to a beautiful young lady dressed extremely in the fashion. We were speaking of the theatre, and I told her how much I had been disappointed not to see one of Shakspeare’s tragedies. ‘ Shakspeare,’ said she, ‘ I have never heard of him.’ I told her how many of our long winter evenings had been cheered by his magic. ‘ Well,’ said she, ‘ I will take some afternoon when I am at leisure and read him.’ I could hardly help smiling, — Shakspeare read in an afternoon !

“ I fear I shall be obliged to spend the two

dollars my father gave me, to purchase shoes, — our village shoemaker is so far behind the fashion. I intended to return them to him untouched, well knowing how ill he can spare so large a sum.

“ I was sorry to leave all C——’s shirts for you to finish. If T—— will put aside her drawing and her flowers for a few days she can help you with them.

“ I forgot to tell you that the tea in the green canister is to be kept for Mr. H——, when he drinks tea with us. He likes no other, and I always make that for him alone. Mrs. —— is very kind, and I have much to entertain me here ; but I long to be at home again, with my work and book, in the quiet of our little parlor, and the children around me. Kiss them all, and my dear father also.

“ P. S. Pray remember to make C—— and B—— dry their feet at night. The weather is now so wet, I am afraid they will get sick, and I not at home to nurse them. Hannah must be careful and prudent. Give my love to the faithful creature. I shall bring her home a fan or a snuff-box.”

During this visit, my sister formed that con-

nection which was afterwards so happily cemented by her marriage. She came home, but only to leave us soon after forever. This was a dreadful loss to me. Hitherto we had shared one object, one room, one wardrobe, one heart. Another's interests were now hers ; " her place was by another's side," and I was widowed. I could not repine, for she was happy, but the charm of existence had gone. I had lost my second self, my second conscience. I had leaned on her ; I must now support others. The staff had left my side ; I must descend the path of life alone. It is not the gay, the loquacious, the talented, whose loss is most deplored in the domestic circle. The loving, the disinterested, the self-sacrificing, are those who come back to us in all the quiet hours of life, and who are loved and mourned in the deepest recesses of our hearts. They are like the gentle dews of a summer evening. They melt into the heart, and keep fresh and green all those unostentatious charms that make the daily beauty of domestic life. Perhaps they are never heard of beyond the circle of home ; but there, the deep fountain of their love and devotion keeps alive the blessings that Providence has dispensed to the humblest fireside in our happy country.

LETTER XIV.

“ Das Herz ist gestorben, die Welt ist leer.”

SCHILLER.

“ My God ! I thank thee ! may no thought
E’er deem thy chastisement severe ;
But may this heart, by sorrow taught,
Calm each vain wish, each idle fear.”

NORTON.

THE next severe affliction that came upon us after the marriage of my sister, was the illness of the fairest, the flower and favorite of our little circle. She was five or six years younger than myself, and I had been to her a sort of mother sister, while she had repaid me with the love of a sister, and the confiding tenderness of a child. As half a century has passed since she was laid in the all-forgetting grave, perhaps you will pardon me for dwelling a little on her memory.

In loveliness of person she surpassed all whom I can now remember. Small, but exquisitely formed, even faultless features were

shaded by hair of raven blackness. Large hazel eyes were softened by the most tender expression of sensibility and truth. She had, from infancy, a dove-like temper, united with the most winning vivacity and playfulness. This is, I think, a rare union ; for the temperament susceptible of great excitement and vivacity is often attended with an irritable temper.

Considering her youth, for she died at seventeen, the love of the beautiful was remarkably developed in her mind. Without instruction, she had become a tolerable proficient in drawing, — and had learnt to color her pictures from imitating the colors of nature. By her own unassisted efforts, she had made a flower-garden, where she cultivated all the rare flowers she could procure ; and every morning in summer, not only was there a fresh vase on the mantel-piece, but a fresh bouquet by the side of every cup at breakfast. At that early age she could not have read *Ophelia*, but the flowers were always selected with reference to the character of the person for whom they were chosen. To my father, with rare delicacy, she always gave a bunch of fragrant shrubs, thinking, no doubt, that gay flowers were not suited to gray hairs.

About the age of fifteen, without any apparent cause, her gay spirits became overclouded with a shade of melancholy. All her mirth forsook her. She had till this time sung as the birds sing, because she could not help it. She had been happy and gay like the young lambs; like the beautiful flowers, her protegèes, rejoicing in sunshine and in showers.

“Glad hearts, without reproach or blot,
Who do God’s work, and know it not.”

We sought in vain for the cause of this change. Perhaps her health began *then* imperceptibly to fail. Perhaps living so much in solitude, her imagination had received a premature development, and the food which our narrow circle afforded her had become exhausted. Susceptible minds should not at this early age indulge in reverie and solitary musings. Mothers, who think of almost every thing, should think also of this. A young girl, who is left without congenial society before those deep affections which constitute the happiness of every woman have taken possession of the heart, is prone to indulge the imagination in vague dreams of a happiness never to be realized in this “working-day world.” They are too often, like the gossamer woven in soli-

tude and darkness, but brightened by the morning sun, which fades as his beams decline, or is broken and vanishes with a breath. Healthy occupation, out-of-door exercise, or the most homely amusements, should take the place, in sensitive characters, of solitary reverie.

I remember the first intimation I had of her approaching debility. We were walking under the trees of our orchard of a summer's evening, and she was repeating poetry, of which her mind was full, while I could never remember a line. The walk was short, but every time we turned her voice failed, and she leaned against a tree for support. A pang like that caused by the point of an arrow went through my heart. We returned to the house, — a concealed, but heavy sorrow, had settled down on my mind.

From that hour I was sensible that she gradually failed, and in less than a year, she was laid on the bed from which she never rose. I nursed her day and night through that long illness. At length the film of death gathered over the beautiful eye; the brow and cheek became ashy pale, and the thin blue lips, that once had been the rosy and dimpled abode of love, would hardly meet upon the pearly teeth. Death approached with timid, almost impercep-

tible steps. He seemed reluctant to lay his icy hand on one so lovely ; but at last the gentle eye was closed, the loving heart was still. No other eye could ever turn to me with such confiding love, no other heart would ever beat with the indulgent tenderness of hers.

How mysterious was death ! What a celestial calm had settled down upon that beautiful form, till then alive to every gentle emotion ! What a holy tranquillity ! It seemed too sacred to be broken by the sighs of my bursting heart, to be disturbed by the agony of my regret.

She left me in the beginning of April. The snowdrops, those lingerers on the skirts of winter, the violets, the earliest messenger of spring, were all alive in her little garden ; the first, with its chaste, white blossoms, the other, with its sweet perfume, had come forth to meet her ; the one an emblem of her purity, the other of her true humility. The robin was there to cheer, with his early song, her who had fed and sheltered him. But, alas ! the spirit was not there. The lovely temple that had enshrined it was cold and lifeless.

“ What wakest thou in the heart, O Spring ?
Vain longings for the dead ! ”

Where are ye, oh beloved ? There is no

voice from the cold, unanswering grave ! The blue, ethereal sky responds not to our prayer ! We must be satisfied that Jesus has said, " I am the resurrection and the life ; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ! "

Death, at that time my inexorable enemy, has since become familiar as a domestic friend. He waits to unite the last of a household with the younger and better, who have gone before. As I look back on seventy years, crowned at once by length of days and distinguished blessings, the resting-places seem all marked with tears, and remind me of that touching circumstance, that when the tombs were opened at Pompeii, the wreaths of flowers were turned to ashes, while the vials containing the tears of relatives were unchanged and perfect. We cannot expect to escape the penalty annexed to length of days. Children and grandchildren have left me ; the familiar friend has fallen from my side in the down-hill path of life. Strange faces meet me, strange footsteps pass me, and I feel that I am alone in a world that belongs to a younger generation.

But I must ask your indulgence ; I fear I have exceeded the limits of the last century, as

well as the utmost extent of your patience. I fear, my dear friend, in recording the scenes of my youth, my letters have been too deeply tinged with the coloring of egotism. In recalling the shades of long-buried friends, I could scarcely avoid mingling my former self, also a *shadow*, with them. This, I trust, you will pardon, together with all the other faults of a garrulous *old woman*.

7/3

